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SUGGESTED INFORMATION ON RECONDITIONING HOME INTERIORS -

FURNITURE AND BUILT-IN EQUIPMENT

(Prepared by the Advisory Committee on  
Reconditioning, Remodeling, and Modernizing,  
Division of Building and Housing.)

Introduction

This pamphlet is primarily intended for the use of owners of small homes who are remodeling or modernizing their property. Changes or additions to the structure of a rented house or the rooms of an apartment building should be made only with permission of the house owner, and all fixed additions become the property of the house owner.

The text deals with remodeling in its relation to inexpensive interior changes, such as built-in furniture and equipment, or renovating the furniture available to bring it into harmony with the modernized home.

Only one phase of the modernizing activity is covered, because the pamphlet is intended as a unit in a group of circulars that are planned to cover many kinds of modernizing.

Relation of House and Furniture

When a family starts to remodel a house, to recondition or modernize it, many questions arise regarding the best ways of redecorating the rooms and furnishing them. The finish of the walls, the lighting effects, and the hangings are so closely related to the structure that they could advantageously be considered at the same time that the remodeling work is being planned. The furniture in a house should be in harmony with the wall finish and the hangings, and should also be considered simultaneously. The relation of the furniture to the structure is important. A house that is good in design may be made dreary and depressing by its furnishings, whereas a house that is unpretentious may become quite attractive when it is artistically decorated.

Furniture to be in harmony with rough-textured walls should be of the coarser-grained woods, dull finished, and used with rich colorings in upholstery and hangings, and with dark toned rugs. But the furniture that will combine well with the smoothly finished, painted or papered walls, and the neatly polished wood floors covered with soft toned rugs, will be of the fine-grained woods, with rubbed oil finish, displayed against equally soft-textured and tinted draperies.

Suitable furniture for a room depends so largely on its proportions, the texture of walls and hangings, the coloring effects, free wall spaces, and the use the occupants wish to make of the room that no hard and fast rules can be laid down for the proper selection of furniture, yet a unity of house and furnishings is much to be desired.

Space is deceptive, an empty room seems much larger than one that is crowded, and a change merely in the arrangement of furniture seems to give additional width or depth.

### Modernizing by Furniture Rearrangement

If a house is being remodeled or redecorated the whole place may be made to appear like new by changing furniture from one room to another, or by changing the position of one piece with reference to that of another within a room.

In any extensive rearrangement of furniture, as would be required when a house is being completely remodeled, it is wise to plan the placing of furniture in advance, even to drawing rough plans of the rooms, using, possibly, a scale of half an inch to a foot, and arranging the furniture, also drawn to scale and cut from paper, on the room plans before the time of actually moving. By advance planning it may be easy to work out a definite and pleasing arrangement with the pieces already owned, or, if some pieces do not fit at all, perhaps they can be sold, and others substituted for them. It is usually easier to move on paper than in any other way.

Three important factors should be considered in planning a room: The proper size or "scale" relationship between pieces of furniture, the grouping of furniture for balance and convenience, and the development of a definite center of interest.

In purchasing new furniture and the problem of buying the proper sizes to fit the spaces in the rooms is relatively simple, although it may be necessary to shop about considerably to find just the right pieces; but if old pieces are to be used, or some old and some new ones, the problem may be difficult.

If the homemaker is planning the rearrangement of a large living room that has high ceilings and ten or more feet of unbroken wall space on a side, tall pieces could be used, and heavy broad ones may be suitable -- a davenport and a piano might both be allowable; but if the living room is small, and the wall space is broken by windows and doorways, it may not conveniently hold even a davenport and a radio cabinet. Massive overstuffed furniture and heavy cabinets are in better proportion to spacious rooms with high ceilings than are small light pieces; and the slender graceful furniture is better suited to the medium-sized or small rooms of modern houses and apartments than are the large heavy pieces.

The placing of certain pieces is a problem. Will the light shine on a mirror here, or a sideboard there? Should the couch be close by the fireplace or over nest to the windows? Where should this great chair be stationed so that it will be a place of rest rather than "a block signal to through traffic"?



In the arrangement of furniture, one should strive for a nice balance on each side of the room, and on one side of the room in relation to the other. A tall desk on one side requires a piece of similar size and weight on the opposite side for balance, or a picture may be used over a low piece to give the appearance of height. Pictures may be used quite effectively in changing the balance, as well as the general character, of a room. It is well to guard against placing several tall pieces or a number of equal depth in a continuous line along one wall.

Formal balance is attained by placing articles of equal weight and height on each side of a central point. For example, a chair of equal weight and style may be placed at equal distance on each side of a window, stand, desk, radio cabinet, archway, chest of drawers, or a fireplace. This arrangement becomes monotonous, however, if it is carried to extremes in any room.

Informal balance may be a little more difficult to attain but the result is usually worth the effort. It is accomplished simply by swinging the weight from a central point to one side or the other, and balancing it with two or more weights on the opposite side. For example, a davenport on one side of a fireplace may be balanced by an armchair and reading table on the other side, or by two chairs and a small table.

A definite center of interest should be chosen and the furniture grouped in an attractive manner about this center. It may be a fireplace, a fine old secretary, or several windows that look toward a pleasing view. The tastes of the family would govern the choice of a center of interest. What is the most favorable feature of the room to choose? If the center is a fireplace, the homemaker will want the chairs so grouped that the family and the guests may enjoy the glow of the flames. If the secretary is selected, and it is a fine piece of polished wood in some period design,\* the furniture should not only be grouped so as to show it to advantage, but the other furniture should be in harmony with it, either of the same period or one that combines nicely with it, similar in line, wood, and finish. If the windows are to be chosen as the center of interest, they should be so draped as to make a frame for the picture\*\* and the furniture should be so grouped that the family can read, write, sew, or converse where the eyes can rest at will on the landscape.

The placing of furniture should be governed largely by the use that is to be made of it. A reading group, for instance, might consist of book shelves, a table, a light, and an easy chair. The pieces could conveniently be grouped in a corner, preferably near a window or windows. A writing group should also be near windows, and could include a desk or writing table, a waste basket, an adjustable light, and a straight chair. A fireside group might be made up of a davenport or easy chairs, or both, a small table, possibly a magazine

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\* A discussion of furniture designs and the periods in which they were originated, as well as much useful information on the general construction of furniture, may be found in "Furniture, Its Selection and Use," issued by the National Committee on Wood Utilization, and sold by the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C., at 10 cents a copy.

\*\* See "Principles of Window Curtaining," Farmers' Bulletin No. 1633, sold by the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C. Price 10 cents.

rack, and a conveniently placed light or lights.\*

In the rearrangement of furniture one should not forget to watch the general effect of the grouping from the doorway of a room. The picture of an interior may be as pleasing, in its way, as an exterior view from a window.

### Renovating Old Furniture

The homemaker may be required to use old pieces of furniture that appeal to the eye neither in form nor finish. It may be possible to dispose of one or two particularly inharmonious ones, or, if they are good in line, to re-finish them. Old paint can be easily taken off with a prepared paint remover. The surfaces can then be scraped, sandpapered, and repainted or stained. If the wood has a nice grain, it may be rubbed with linseed oil, and later waxed until it has a fine "egg shell" finish.\*\*

If one can not afford to dispose of some large and much ornamented pieces which are not appropriate to present-day furnishing, and yet desires to modernize the home, it may be possible to change the appearance of the furniture by removing some of the ornaments and refinishing the uncovered surfaces. Perhaps a local cabinetmaker could use a saw to advantage. The head of a bedstead might be lowered. The heavy uprights that hold the mirror over the bureau might be removed, and the mirror might be hung over a "chest of drawers." The bunches of grapes might be taken off the drawer handles, or the handles might be removed entirely and plain brass pulls substituted for them.

Some old pieces may be reupholstered, and thus improved. Many shops are prepared to do such work. It is wise, if the expense is not unreasonable, to have it done rather than to try to do it oneself, as the tying of the springs and placing of the coverings requires considerable skill. If the springs are tight and firm, it may be possible to recover upholstered parts without disturbing springs or filling. Sample strips of velour or tapestry may be utilized in recovering old chairs and thus brightening their appearance. New cushions, selected to harmonize with other furnishings, add touches of color and cheer to rooms that are being modernized.

Furniture dries out and deteriorates rapidly when it is used in houses that are not properly heated and ventilated. It is apt to dry and crack if there is insufficient moisture in the air when heat is turned on after a house has been open during the summer. Several gallons of water should be evaporated each day in a small house during the season of artificial heat and closed windows, if furniture is to be kept in good condition.\*\*\* If furniture is badly

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\* Many women's magazines and home building publications carry helpful articles and illustrations on artistic home furnishing and arrangement.

\*\* Brief directions for refinishing furniture are given in the "Better Homes Manual" published by the University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Ill, or in a free circular "Refinishing and Care of Furniture" issued by the Iowa State College. (Home Economics Circular 19, 1925.) A local paint dealer can often give necessary directions for refinishing furniture.

\*\*\* The book on "Furniture," previously referred to, gives some information on the care of furniture, the required humidity in rooms, and methods of attaining it.



damaged by heat or hard usage and needs careful repair, gluing, replacements or refinishing, it is usually desirable to send it to a regular repair shop for such attention.

### Built-in Furniture and Equipment

The tendency in modern home making is to plan for compact rooms that are arranged to make full use of even the smallest space. Cupboards and closets conceal unused objects so that the rooms may always appear orderly. Built-in furniture is usually attractive, lends interest to a room, and is very useful.\* In modernizing work, it may be desirable to build in certain equipment, where space permits, and the home owner feels that the new arrangement will be a permanent improvement. As opinions differ regarding conveniences in a room, any built-in features should be carefully considered in relation to the resale values thus affected in a home. Equipment that may be a convenience to one person may be an obstacle to another, so this word of caution is given. It may be well to get the advice of an architect or expert builder before planning the installation of any unusual built-in equipment.

If it seems desirable to add several features due consideration should be given to each one to determine whether or not it is immediately essential. It is well to consider the need of each additional convenience in relation to the upkeep of the structural part of the house. Certain repair work, such as re-roofing a part or all of the building, refinishing the walls, or repairing the heating or plumbing system may be more essential, where funds are limited, than the installation of additional equipment.\*\*

Where funds are sufficient, however, and remodeling work is being planned, some built-in features may be quite desirable. When a partition is being moved, it may cost very little extra to build in cupboards, cabinets, or shelves, which would be rather expensive if undertaken at any other time. Much equipment may be purchased ready-made, or cut and fitted so that it can be easily installed. Different kinds of composition board now on the market may be used for the building of cabinets, shelves, and even partitions, where measurements require that they be especially constructed. The prospect of buying or building new furniture or equipment lends a certain zest to plans for modernizing.

Individual needs prompt the building of certain kinds of equipment. The storing of books, dishes, clothes, toys or playthings may lead to the building of certain cabinets. If they are well located and well built, however, they

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\* Two pamphlets, issued by national associations and available on request, give detailed suggestions on built in furniture. They are: "Built in Beauty for Homes Old and New," Southern Pine Association, New Orleans, La., and "Modern Home Interiors," National Lumber Manufacturers Association, 1337 Connecticut Avenue, N. W., Washington, D. C.

\*\* See "Care and Repair of the House," sold by the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C. Price 15 cents.

may be used for different purposes, but with equal appreciation for their convenience, by successive families who may live in the house, should it be sold.

Many rooms are so designed that artistic and comfortable arrangement of furniture is difficult. A living room may not have sufficient wall space to accommodate large pieces of furniture. The room may have no space whatever for books. A practical arrangement, if the house plan permits, may be effected by building book shelves on each side, or even on one side of the fireplace. If the house plan is such that the building in of these book shelves

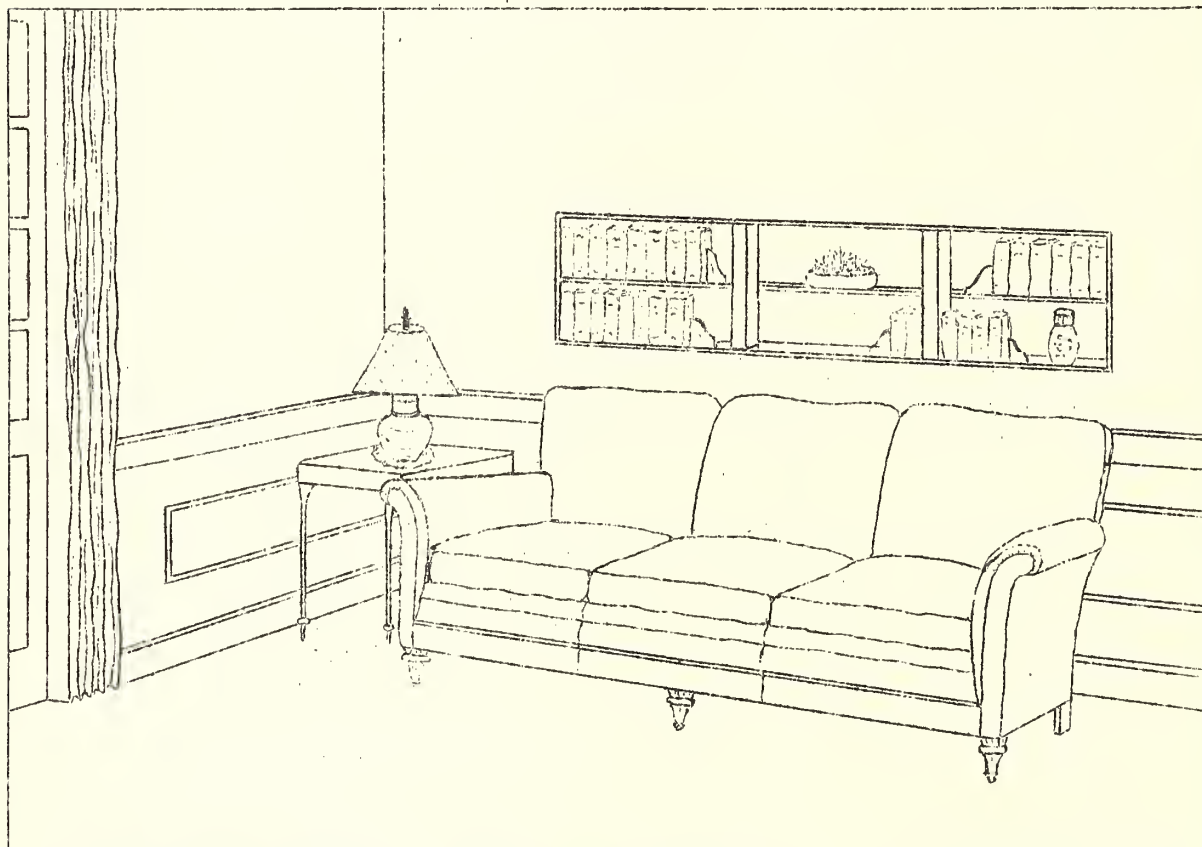


Fig. 1 - Built in shelves over davenport.

would interfere with the opening of necessary doors, the shelves might be built in a corner, or around a window or radiator.

Possibly, if a room has too many doorways, one may be closed and the room still be accessible from other parts of the house. A shallow cupboard or open shelves may easily be constructed in a door space. The old frames form the walls of the new cupboard.

If the living room is being remodeled, and wall space is available for a davenport, but no space is allowable for a book case, it may be possible to have shelves set into the wall above the davenport, about 4 feet from the floor. (See Fig. 1.). Such shelving, if extending over more than two stud

spacings, should, preferably, be built around the studs to avoid cutting these load-bearing members. To secure the necessary depth of shelves 6 inch or deeper studs would be required. The uncovered wood could be smoothed and painted to match the finish of the other woodwork in the room.

In the arrangement of kitchen furniture and fixtures, as in other parts of the house, the use to be made of the different pieces tends to govern the placing of them. Artistic appearance is usually sacrificed to convenience in the kitchen, although it may be possible to attain both.

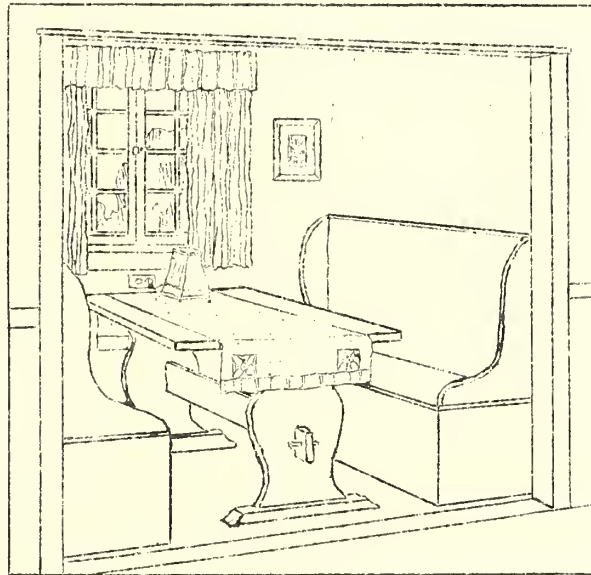


Fig. 2 - Breakfast nook.

If the kitchen is very small, an alcove might be added to one of the kitchen walls that would hold the refrigerator. Such an alcove might save the family the inconvenience of keeping the refrigerator on the back step landing. An extra window in the alcove would give light and cheer to the kitchen.

A breakfast alcove might be added to the kitchen to increase its size. Possibly a part of a porch might be converted into a breakfast nook. If a kitchen is over large, it might be convenient to partition off a breakfast nook in one corner or between two doorways. The arrangement is simple and comparatively inexpensive. (See Fig. 2.).

If the space is unsuited to the building of a breakfast nook, and it still seems desirable to provide a place where breakfasts may be served informally, or where the children may eat in the kitchen, a breakfast cabinet might be constructed that would be neat and practical. Such a cabinet might be built in or securely attached to the wall. The front of the cabinet would be one straight piece hinged to the lowest shelf. A brace, hinged to the other end of the straight piece would furnish a support for the folding breakfast table. (See Fig. 3.)

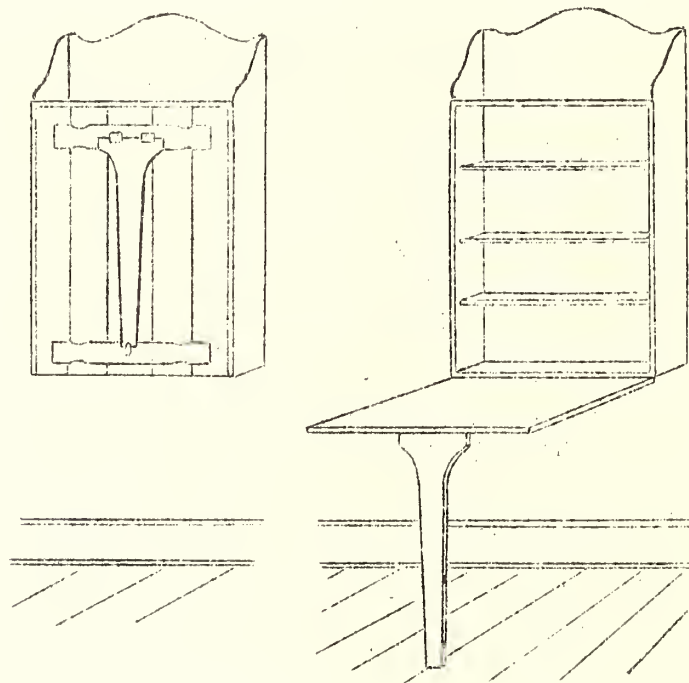


Fig. 3 - Cabinet with hinged shelf for breakfast table.

Where space is not available for a cabinet or a nook, a small, collapsible table might be hinged to the wall so that it would fold against the wall when not in use.

Open shelving on which may be kept frequently-used materials and utensils lessens work in the kitchen. Small shelves near the stove may hold matches, salt, pepper, spices, etc. Shelves near the sink are handy for soap, brushes, cleaning fluids, etc.



A grocery and milk receiving cupboard may be built on the porch just outside the kitchen door, or, in more extensive remodeling work, it might be built into the wall and fitted with doors to make it accessible from both the porch and the kitchen. It might be wise to provide a lock for the outside opening.

A built-in ironing board, with a shallow cupboard beneath it, where the iron, and such small kitchen hardware as hammer, tacks, and screwdriver may be stored, is an inexpensive but convenient addition to the kitchen. (See Fig. 4). If it is extended to the floor, space may also be provided for strings and paper.

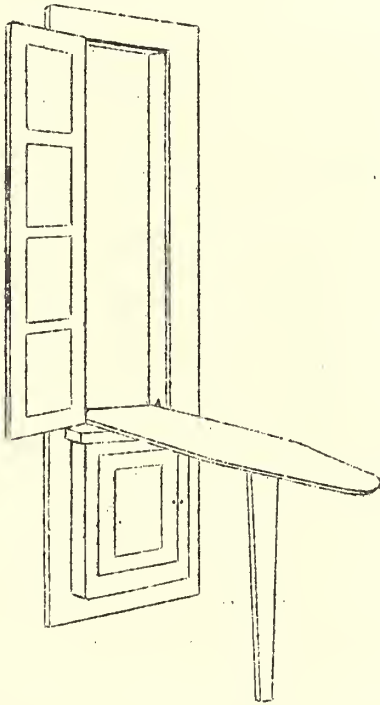


Fig. 4 - Ironing board.

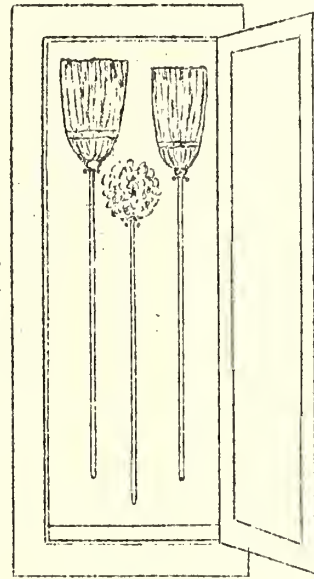


Fig. 5 - Broom closet.

A built-in broom closet, fitted with clasps to hold the brooms and mops neatly in place, saves wear on the brooms and mops as well as steps for the house keeper, who might otherwise have to stand them in an out-of-the-way corner. (See Fig. 5). Such closets should preferably be lined with metal to reduce the fire hazard.

In the dining room, it is convenient to have built-in cupboards. The home maker may also appreciate a built-in sideboard, a pass closet to the kitchen, or a small storage cabinet for jellies and canned goods. An attractive glassed-in cupboard may be made between a dining room and a sun porch, if in the remodeling work an old doorway may be thus utilized. French doors are placed flush with the old door frames. Wood or glass shelves are used at the sash levels, and colorful vases, dishes, and pottery are displayed on the shelves.

A dressing table with a mirror or mirrors at the back and rows of small drawers at the sides, built into a bedroom or bathroom is a delight to any fastidious person.

Closets on either side of a built-in dressing table, with drawers and shelves to hold different kinds of clothing, and open space, fitted with rods for clothes hangers, are conveniences that make orderliness in a bedroom comparatively easy. (See Fig. 6.). These additions naturally take up part of the room space, and should be carefully measured and planned.

In the bathroom, a built-in medicine cabinet covered by a mirror is at-

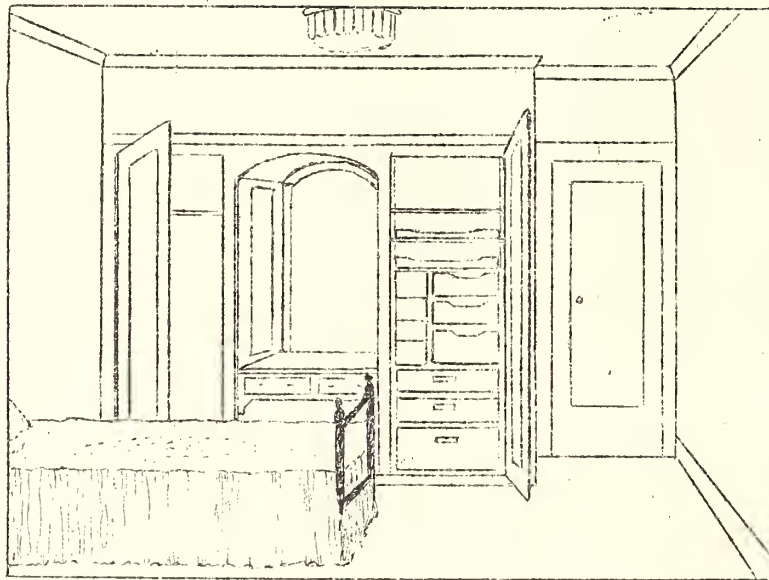


Fig. 6 - Built-in dressing table and closets.

tractive and useful. Open shelving on either or both sides of the mirror may be desirable. This shelving, sunk into the wall flush with the cabinet provides convenient space for toilet articles. If space permits the building of another small cabinet or tier of drawers, towels and other bathroom supplies can be stowed away in the room where they are needed. A long mirror, either built-in or fastened to the wall or door, is convenient in a bathroom, dressing room, or bedroom. Additional side lights, adjustable, or at a convenient height are desirable with the installation of new equipment, especially mirrors.\*

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\* Any permanent wiring should only be undertaken by an experienced electrician in accordance with the provisions of the National Electrical Code. See Bureau of Standards Circular No. 397, "Safety for the Household," sold by the Superintendent of Documents, Washington, D. C. Price 15 cents.

Space for a recreation room or a children's play room may be available and, if it is, the family may thoroughly enjoy planning it and making it homelike. A play room should have open shelves, cupboards, and closets of a height to accommodate the children who are to use them. Open space for playthings encourages children to keep them in order.

If the basement is being modernized and a recreation room is being planned, partitions might shut off storage and fuel space from the remainder of the basement. The furnace might be screened and the coal concealed. Where the walls are dark, they might be painted in light-reflecting colors, such as yellow, ivory, or parchment. Old pieces of furniture, no longer needed in other parts of the house, might be refinished according to a definite color scheme for use in a basement recreation room. Stairways to basements should be painted and inclosed, or if left open provided with substantial rails. Other safety measures should be observed in basement modernizing. The amount of combustible materials in recreation or playrooms should be kept at a minimum. All partitions and ceilings should be of fire-resistant materials. Provision should be made for controlling the entrance to the furnace space to prevent young children from tampering with the furnace or playing with fire.

Provided space is available, a basement workshop may be fitted up, in addition to or in place of the recreation room. In it many useful and simple pieces of furniture can be made at home,\* either for the recreation or play room or for other parts of the house or grounds.

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Further information of interest to home owners is contained in other circulars issued by the Advisory Committee on Reconditioning, Remodeling, and Modernizing, Division of Building and Housing, Bureau of Standards, Department of Commerce, Washington, D. C.

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\* See: "You Can Make It," "You Can Make It For Camp and Cottage," and "You Can Make It For Profit," issued by the National Committee on Wood Utilization, and sold by the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C. The price of each booklet is 5 cents.



